



STAKEHOLDERS AND FACILITATORS

Community Visioning is a group decision-making process. In order to achieve popular support for the CD Plan, everyone who will be affected by it (the "stakeholders") should be invited to participate in the Visioning process. A hired or designated facilitator is essential to efficiently guide the process and keep it from bogging down.

Stakeholders can include:

- Municipal officials (e.g. Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Selectmen, Mayor).
- Residents across the full spectrum of age and income levels.
- Advocates in housing, the environment, economic development, and transportation.
- Members of civic organizations.
- Religious community.
- Local businesses.
- Developers and builders.
- Human and social service providers Community Development Corporations (CDCs), realtors, municipal employees (public safety, teachers, highway department, etc.).
- Seasonal residents.

The facilitator will:

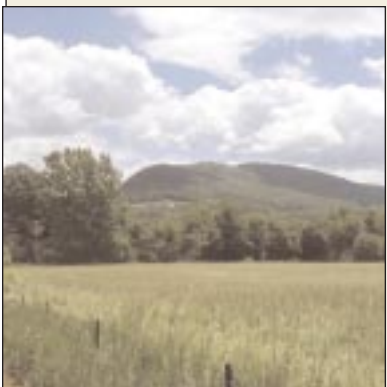
- Remain neutral in the discussion.
- Elicit participation from all members of the group.
- Guide the group through a series of questions.
- Manage the way information is presented.
- Periodically summarize what has been said.
- Keep the discussion focused.
- Listen for and help resolve what is unclear.
- Help the group draw inferences and conclusions from the ideas generated by the group.

METHODS FOR SHARING INFORMATION AND IDEAS WITHIN THE GROUP

The first step in the Visioning process is developing a method for sharing information and ideas within the group. Such methods include brainstorming and charrettes.

Whatever process is selected, it should not be used as a forum for political debate, placing blame for past actions, individual posturing, or procrastinating. Rather it should be regarded as a first step toward collaboration, balance, progress and action for the coming years.

In Visioning, every idea offered by the stakeholders is worthy of consideration because all members are equally entitled to influence group outcomes. This process is most valuable when participants come with an open mind, a willingness to participate wholeheartedly, and a desire to contribute their time and energy to making this step in the planning process a success.



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an effective tool for expanding the thinking of a group and for identifying dimensions of an issue. It is used to create as many ideas as possible in a short period of time.

Brainstorming can be either structured or unstructured. In the structured method, a round robin process is used where each group member in turn is asked for an idea. The process continues until everyone has "passed" and no additional ideas are offered. In the unstructured method, group members voice ideas in a random pattern. It is a less formal and more relaxed process. The difficulty is that the most vocal group members may dominate the process.

Rules of brainstorming:

- Never criticize an idea - either in words or body language.
- Write down every idea on a flip chart or blackboard. This allows everyone to see the words and may generate other ideas. Put down the words as expressed by the speaker - don't interpret.
- There is no such thing as a foolish or stupid idea.
- It is okay to piggyback on other ideas or join ideas into a new statement.
- Do it quickly - 10 to 15 minutes works well although this time guideline is somewhat dependent upon the number of participants.

Charrette

A charrette is an intensely focused work session to generate input from concerned citizens and officials. What distinguishes a charrette from brainstorming is that in a charrette, ideas are expressed visually through sketches, diagrams, and maps as well as through words. This means that architects and planners (either citizen volunteers or professional consultants) participate in the charrette, so that they can help the participants express their ideas in visual form.

The charrette can help to identify critical issues needing further in-depth analysis and to develop recommended strategies of action.

Methods for determining priorities

The group participating in any one of these exercises can review a broad range of suggestions and identify priorities by using any of the following methods: nominal group technique, voting dots, and consensus. Such methods can be used individually, or (more often) in combination.

Nominal Group Technique

This technique is useful for eliciting and clarifying opinions, and developing group recommendations. The nominal group technique can be used for a small group or for a larger group that is broken out into small groups.



When using these techniques, provide 2-5 minutes of "I" time where participants can make notes to themselves on the topics before them. This will allow the process to move quickly and is designed to allow those who want brief time to collect their thoughts and articulate ideas to do so.





Each small group is given the same question to address, and each has a facilitator. Participants begin by individually writing down responses to the question. As in brainstorming, participants go around the group, each person stating one item from his or her list, and going around repeatedly until all items have been covered. The rules of brainstorming apply as well.

The facilitator writes each item verbatim on a flip chart; the group holds off on discussion. Items are then discussed, clarified, and numbered. The ideas may be combined if the people presenting the comments agree. Using index cards -- one card for each item -- each participant writes down his or her top ten items, ranking them from 10 (top priority) to 1. The facilitator collects the cards and records the number of "votes" each item received. The group discusses the results and then each participant ranks the 10 highest-scoring items, using the same procedure as before. If more than one group is involved, each facilitator gives his or her group's results to the meeting coordinator.

As an alternative to shorten the process, the group may be asked to consider fewer than ten items. Divide the total number of items on the flip chart by two and add one to determine the number of items to be prioritized. For very long lists or a short time frame divide by three.

To combine the priority lists created by smaller groups, reassemble the large group, present the different priority lists, and vote to adopt one.

Key issues:

- The nominal group technique elicits opinions that might otherwise go unvoiced, by giving participants equal time.
- This technique lets people with different backgrounds communicate their views and together clarify issues; however, this and other techniques that rely on writing and reading skills may marginalize people who lack these skills.
- Important issues may not make the final cut. (One possible solution might be to rank within but not across categories. Another solution might be for participants to rate all items as low, medium, or high priority using scores of 1, 2, and 3, respectively. The scores are then totaled for each item.)

Voting Dots

An alternative or supplement to the nominal group technique, the "voting dots" method uses small, colorful adhesive dots available at school and office supply stores.

Large wall charts are posted listing the different items under consideration. All participants are given the same number of dots and told to vote for the items they think are the most important. They may choose to "spend" all their dots on one response, or they may spread them around. The items are then ranked according to the number of dots received. Discussion of the results may follow.



FACILITATION TECHNIQUES
FOR THE VISIONING PROCESS

For very large groups, it may be necessary to break into smaller groups and run the process concurrently in several different rooms. The process occurs in the same manner, and the voting results are added together. Some validity is lost, however, because like items from the different groups are combined by the facilitators without the participants' input.

Key issues:

- Participants need reasonably good reading skills for the voting procedure.
- Because the voting procedure is not anonymous, participants may feel pressure to vote for some responses over others.
- With a limited number of dots, people must make forced choices and a few dominant issues may receive most of the dots. To lessen this problem, people may be given several dots in different colors to use within different thematic categories, such as environment, housing, economic development, and transportation.

Consensus

Consensus is an alternative to a voting process. With consensus there are no winners and no losers. Through discussion, the entire group reaches a point where participants are willing to allow something to go forward even if they do not enthusiastically support it.

The technique works best when a decision is under discussion. The group leader should ensure that every voice has been heard on the issue under consideration.

Each participant receives three file cards (red, green, and yellow). When ready to check consensus, the group leader asks each person to raise one of his/her cards to demonstrate where he/she is on the decision. Like a stoplight the colors indicate:

- Red: I do not agree and will block the decision.
- Yellow: I agree but I'm not really enthusiastic about the decision.
- Green: I can give an unqualified "yes" to the decision.

Participants are asked to keep their cards raised until everyone has viewed the display. If no red cards are displayed, then a general consensus has been achieved and no participants will block the decision. If a red card is shown, then more discussion is needed and other problem-solving activities such as listing pros and cons might help to move the decision forward.

Key Issues

- Some groups that value consensus spend large amounts of time talking about an issue with no way to move forward.
- Use of the cards demonstrates when the group can move forward.
- Using this model, one individual can block consensus.

COMMUNITY
PLANNING PROFILE*The Challenge:*

A large 1960s commercial shopping center losing businesses to more modern facilities in other towns.

The Solution:

Join with private developers to convert the shopping center into a thriving mixed-use village center.

Twenty years ago, the population of Mashpee on Cape Cod was growing -- but the biggest commercial property in town was shabby and economically struggling. Rather than simply giving it a face-lift, the developer and the town worked together to create a new village center on the site, featuring residential units, retail shops and restaurants, offices, a public library, and a post office. Today Mashpee Commons is economically thriving, and because residents can walk from one area to another, car traffic is reduced.